REMARKS

In the Office Action, the Examiner rejected Claims 1-15, which were all of the then pending claims, under 35 U.S.C. §102 as being fully anticipated by U.S. Patent 5,987,472 (Serafin).

Independent Claims 1, 6 and 11 are being amended to better define the subject matters of these claims. Claims 2, 7 and 12 are being amended to keep the language of these claims consistent with the language of Claims 1, 6 and 11 respectively. New Claims 17 and 17, which are dependent from Claim 1, are being added to describe preferred features of the invention.

For the reasons discussed below, Claims 1-17 patentably distinguish over the prior art and are allowable. The Examiner is, thus, respectfully asked to reconsider and to withdraw the rejection of Claims 1-15 under 35 U.S.C. §102, and to allow these claims and new Claims 16 and 17.

The present invention, generally, relates to searching documents in a collaborative database. In this database, many of the documents may be weakly linked or associated with other documents in the database. Generally, the documents in the database can be separated into two groups: parents and children, with each child document being associated with at least on of the parent documents.

As explained in the present application, problems may occur when searching through the database. One specific problem occurs when a search term is comprised of two or more words. Even though such a search term may be highly relevant to a particular family of documents (a parent document and its related children documents), the search term might not occur, in its entirety, in any one of the family of documents.

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PAGE 14/17 * RCVD AT 11/12/2004 4:21:02 PM [Eastern Standard Time] * SVR:USPTO-EFXRF-1/5 * DNIS:8729306 * CSID:5167424366 * DURATION (mm-ss):04-54

The present invention effectively addresses this problem. The invention does this by combining the family of documents into a master, index document. Then when a search is made, the search is made through that index document, rather than through the individual parent and child documents.

To make this master, index document, selected field items are taken from the parent document and placed as fields in the index document. Also, text is taken both from the parent and child documents and placed in the appropriate fields of the index document. Then, when a search is made for a given term, the fields of the index document are searched for that term. In this way, a term including two or more words may be found even if the entire term does not occur in any one single document of the family.

The prior art does not disclose or suggest this way of searching through a database of collaborative documents. In particular, Serafin discloses a method and system for cross referencing related sub-records in a database. To do this, a cross reference table is generated. Then, when one record is identified as including a given data item, the cross reference table may point to another record also having that data item.

The present invention is not primarily directed to cross referencing the documents, but instead is primarily directed to combining a family of documents to identify a family that includes a search term.

Independent Claims 1, 6 and 11 clearly describe this aspect of the invention. Specifically, Claims 1 and 11 set forth the step of, for each of the parent documents, combining the parent document and the child documents related to that parent document into a master, index document. Both of these claims also indicate that this combining step includes taking selected field items from the parent document, placing said selected field

PAGE 15/17 * RCVD AT 11/12/2004 4:21:02 PM [Eastern Standard Time] * SVR:USPTO-EFXRF-1/5 * DNIS:8729306 * CSID:5167424366 * DURATION (mm-ss):04-54

items as fields on the index document, placing text from said parent document in said fields of the index document, and placing text from said related child documents in said fields of the index document. Claim 6, which is directed to a system for searching a collaborative document database, sets forth analogous apparatus features.

The other references of record have been reviewed, and these other references, whether they are considered individually or in combination, also fail to disclose or suggest the above-discusses aspect of the present invention. For example, U.S. Patent 6,553,364 (Wu) describes a hierarchical search procedure. This reference may address the same problem that is addressed by the present invention, but do so in a completely different way. In particular, Wu organizes the search term into individual subterms, and then conducts a hierarchical search through documents to find a set of documents that, when considered together, have the original search term. The present invention, in contrast, combines a hierarchical set of documents into a single, master document, and then searches through that one master document.

Because of the above-discussed differences between Claims 1, 6 and 11 and the prior art, and because of the advantages associated with those differences, Claims 1, 6 and 11 patentably distinguish over the prior art and are allowable. Claims 2-5, 16 and 17 are dependent from Claim 1 and are allowable therewith. Likewise, Claims 7-10 are dependent from, and are allowable with, Claim 6; and Claims 12-15 are dependent from Claim 11 and are allowable therewith. The Examiner is, accordingly, respectfully requested to reconsider and to withdraw the rejection of Claims 1-15 under 35 U.S.C. §102, and to allow Claims 1-17.

PAGE 16/17 * RCVD AT 11/12/2004 4:21:02 PM [Eastern Standard Time] * SVR:USPTO-EFXRF-1/5 * DNIS:8729306 * CSID:5167424366 * DURATION (mm-ss):04-54

Every effort has been made to place this case in condition for allowance, a notice of which is requested. If the Examiner believes that a telephone conference with Applicants' Attorneys would be advantageous to the disposition of this case, the Examiner is asked to telephone the undersigned.

Respectfully submitted,

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PAGE 17/17 * RCVD AT 11/12/2004 4:21:02 PM [Eastern Standard Time] * SVR:USPTO-EFXRF-1/5 * DNIS:8729306 * CSID:5167424366 * DURATION (mm-ss):04-54

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